

The Death of a Dreamer

By
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It'd been a long and slow week for Paul. He had decided that this week had gone by slower than the week before, but by the normal standards of observation, a person would have a hard time differentiating between them. Not Paul. Paul was good at noticing subtle and tiny differences between things. He spent a great amount of time thinking about the subtle and tiny differences between things. For the last four hours, Paul had been comparing and contrasting the slowness of this week, which was just about to end as the flashing clock in upper right corner of his Macintosh blinked closer and closer 'till that golden hour when he could go home. The clock said 4:48

Fuck it, thought Paul. I don't need a stinking flashing clock's permission to cut out for the day. I don't need anybody's stinking permission. Fuck it.

He pushed back from his desk, punched the power button on his computer monitor with his thumb, and grabbed his car keys.

Car keys clenched in his fist, Paul glanced at his desk telephone. He grimaced, sat back down in his chair and stabbed the speed dial button marked "Joel."

"Joel?" Paul said.

The speakerphone broadcast back to Paul the hum of an empty room.

"Joel?" Paul asked again.

"Yeah?" came back this time over the speaker. Paul could also hear Joel speaking from his office down the hallway.

"I'm gonna cut out for the weekend."

"Uh... ok..." said Joel.

Paul sighed and stabbed at the button that cut the power to the speakerphone, but just as his finger struck the button, Joel's voice cracked over the speaker, "Wait! Paul?"

It was too late. Paul had hung the phone up. Now Paul was faced with a dilemma. His mind raced. Paul toyed with the idea of pretending like he didn't hear him. Paul imagined himself grabbing his case and hitting the hallway. Paul would jet down the hall, fly out the door, be across the parking lot and be sitting in his car before Joel even realized that Paul hadn't heard him.

Paul dialed Joel's office on the speakerphone again. "What is it?"

"Could you come in here a second?" Joel asked him. Paul clenched his forehead and ground his teeth.

"Sure." Paul said, his voice froggy, a rumbling low bass tone.

Joel's office was, by a large margin, the nicest office in the building. It was a corner office, and had brand new blond maple furniture. Joel sat on an overstuffed leather chair, that swiveled and rolled him around the office with greater efficiency and less effort than actually standing up and walking. When Paul entered the office, Joel's back was to him. "Pull the door shut." Joel said without turning around and continuing to punch away at his notebook's keyboard. Paul tried to look over Joel's shoulder to see what Joel was working on. Joel's shoulders were hunched over and the screen of the laptop was tilted just right so that nobody but Joel could see it.

"Have a seat," Joel said.

Was that a friendly tone? Paul asked himself? A warm tone, in Joel's voice, one that said, look Paul, I just called you in here because we're friends, right? You and me, Paul imagined Joel's voice saying, you and me, we're tight, and I've got good things to tell you.

Or was it a warning, deadly serious tone? Paul worried. It could be either really. The two were often hard to distinguish. Paul sat in the armless office chair that sat in front of Joel's highly polished desk.

"Damit!" Joel broke the silence, pushing his laptop away, slapping it shut and spinning his chair around to face Paul, all in one fluid motion.

Paul thought he glimpsed the words "Game Over" on Joel's screen before he snapped it shut. That bastard, Paul thought. He's been in here playing games. Probably across the internet. That bastard. No wonder the net was so slow!

Paul imagined himself reaching over and plucking Joel's head from its place on his neck. Paul would give a twist-pull, and off would come Joel's head like plucking a ripe grape from a vine. Paul saw himself taking Joel's head in his own fleshy palms, holding the head with both hands, raising it up to his mouth and taking long, satisfying bite. It would be like biting into Georgia peached ripened in a paper bag. First, there would be a bit of resistance and Paul's teeth pressed against the soft but firm flesh of Joel's head, but with just a little bit of effort, the teeth would cut. Paul would take large, warm gulps of the head, its juices running down Paul's chin and neck. Sweetness that Paul had never known would flood across his mouth. Sweetness would splash across his tongue and roll down his throat. Paul would eat Joel's head slowly, taking long, lusty bites, and he would laugh! Paul would laugh as he wiped Joel's head juices on his pressed white shirt. He'd pull the shirt out from where it was tucked neatly into his slacks, and he'd lift it up to his face and pad his face dry with it.

And then Paul would take Joel's head, and before he'd finished it, he'd toss it over his shoulder. The head would hit the carpet in Joel's office with a wet thud, and Joel would pad his face with his linen shirt again, smiling, and laughing.

"I'm afraid we're gonna have to let you go, Paul," said Joel matter of factly. Joel's icy eyes sliced Paul as they darted across him, first over his left shoulder, then at his right side, falling where his left knee sat folded over the other on the office chair.

"It's just not working out, Paul."

"I see," Paul croaked.

His body shifted apart where Joel's stare had cut him. He fell, sliced neatly in three sections, into a heap on the floor. Then he walked out the building and got into his car.

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Paul rode his chariot of flames across the sky, his trail leaving blazing streaks of flame that, after he'd passed the horizon, broke up, and came floating down on the city like down feathers.

"Faster! Faster!" Paul cried as he whipped the mighty stallions that pulled him. We must return to our palace! Paul cried We must return to our home in the sun!

Paul's body slumped across the steering wheel, and then fell across the console of his 1989 civic hatchback, which had come suddenly up over his legs when the car had struck the oncoming school bus. After striking, the hatchback bounced across two lanes of traffic, tumbling once or twice, and finally embedding itself in a telephone pole. The schoolbus lie tipped over on its side.

Blood dripped from Paul's mouth, rolled across his chin and dribbled down the console... "Faster!" Paul gurgled. "Faster, stallions! We must reach the fading sun."



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